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Pilgrimage

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The INQUIRER

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**"To promote a free and inquiring
religion through the worship of
God and the celebration of life; the
service of humanity and respect for
all creation; and the upholding of the
liberal Christian tradition."**

*From the Object passed at the
General Assembly of the Unitarian and
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Inquiring Words How to Begin (Changing Your Life)

Let me share with you 10 simple hints on beginning – on how to re-boot your spiritual life, if it has become automatic or stale. Getting your soul in shape may lead to awe-inspiring mystical encounters some day. Yet how to begin (or begin anew) isn't the least bit mystifying. Here are 10 simple thoughts to launch you on your way.

1 Begin here. How deeply you would long for all the things you take for granted, if suddenly you lost them. So much of what we want we have already, so want what you have. Begin here.

2 Begin now. You have everything you need. Everything. Plus the bonus of today, one day more than you will have if you wait until tomorrow. Begin now.

3 Begin as you are. At your fingertips is a treasure trove of memories and dreams. Put one good memory together with one good dream and you are ready to begin. (Good memories are memories that make you feel good about yourself. Good dreams are the stuff of which tomorrow's good memories are made.) Begin as you are.

4 Begin by doing what you can. No more, but also no less. Don't throw yourself against the wall. Walk around it. You can't do the impossible, but so much is possible. So many of the things you haven't tried you still can do. To get around the wall, you can set out in either direction—the wall has two ends. The important thing is to start walking. Begin by doing what you can.

5 Begin with those who are closest to you. They can cheer you on only if you let them. Invite them to give you a hand – bow. And to lend you a hand – ask. And to take your hand – no one can take your hand, if you bury it in your pocket. You say they won't cheer you on, help you out, or take your hand? Maybe not, but how will you know without asking? Begin by asking.

6 Begin by turning the page. Today you can open a new chapter of your life. If you are trapped in your story (stuck in place, botching the same old lines), revise the script. Practice a new line or two. When reading a book, we sometimes reach the bottom of a page only to realise we have been glossing over its words without registering their meaning. We haven't been paying attention. We don't have the faintest idea what we've just read. So we go back to the top of the page and try to concentrate. It happens again. Sentences dissolve into words. Words into sounds. The books of our lives are no different. Resist the temptation to wallow over some dark passage until you know exactly what went wrong. You never will. Besides, perfection is not life's goal. Neither is unnecessary pain. If you are stuck, open a new chapter. Turn the page.

7 Begin by cleaning up your slate. Don't erase the past. File it by experience, to keep it handy should you need it. But don't obsess over it. Ticking off a growing list of grievances gets you nothing from life's store. As for the things on your 'To-Do' list that you'll probably never do, place them under a statute of limitations. When they serve no longer to inspire but only to haunt you, cross them off. Not only is there no reason to carry over unnecessary indictments from one day to the next, but you'll also never reform the things you can about yourself, until you stop trying to reform the things you can't. Begin by cleaning up your slate.

(Continued on back page)

Seeking the field of the stars

Following a visit to Santiago de Compostela, **Lyanne Mitchell** asks what pilgrimage could mean – without relics or dogma.

I visited Santiago de Compostela in the north-west corner of Spain for the second time. I had been there 10 years ago – and on both occasions, I was moved to see the pilgrims, lots of them young people, arriving at the cathedral wearing scallop shells around their necks (like the one on the cover) or attached to their back-packs. The scallop shell is the symbol of St James, the fisherman disciple. Most of them also carried the pilgrim's staff. They crowded into the cathedral and queued for hours to go down to the crypt where the bones of St James, disciple and cousin of Jesus, are said to be enshrined, then to embrace or kiss the statue of St James which some believe will grant the pilgrim time off in purgatory.

I was deeply impressed by their faith – and was reminded of the story of Jesus and the ten lepers. One Samaritan leper, was the only one to turn back after being healed, to give thanks to God, and Jesus said, *'Arise, go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole.'*

Christian legend tells that St James the Elder, one of the 12 apostles of Jesus, travelled widely on the Iberian Peninsula, bringing Christianity to the Celtic peoples. Following his martyrdom in Jerusalem around 44 AD, his relics were supposedly taken back to Spain and enshrined. Due to Roman persecution however, the early Spanish Christians were forced to abandon the shrine and, with the de-population of the area following the fall of the Roman Empire, the location of the shrine was forgotten. In 813 or 838 AD, so the legend goes, a hermit led by a beckoning star and celestial music discovered the location of the buried relics.

Historians however, doubt that St James ever visited Spain and the idea that his relics were transported to Iberia is thought to be a fabrication of the Church. The 'discovery' of the relics provided a convenient rallying point for Christian Spain, then confined to a narrow strip at the north of the Iberian Peninsula, most of which was occupied by the Moors. In addition to the story of the relics' discovery there were also reports of Santiago Matamoro, or St James the Moorslayer, appearing on a white horse in 844 AD to lead Christians into battle against the Moors. These two legends are in-

terpreted by scholars of the Age of Medieval Pilgrimage as attempts by ecclesiastical authorities to gather popular support for the overthrow of the Arabs. Furthermore, it is known that officials of the Cathedral of Santiago actually hired storytellers to travel about the European countryside spreading 'news' of the miracles of St James and his relics.

While this deceit and corruption of the Church may be shocking, it is a well-authenticated historical fact that many of the founding legends of medieval pilgrimage shrines were nothing more than tall tales. Such stories were conjured up by enterprising church administrators who recognized that the number of pilgrims visiting and donating money to a shrine was proportional to the miraculous nature of the founding legend – and the degree to which that legend was promoted. The first church was constructed over the tomb where St James' relics were 'found', in 829 AD, and within 100 years Santiago de Compostela was attracting pilgrims from throughout Europe. By the 12th century, it had become the centre of the greatest pilgrimage in medieval Europe.

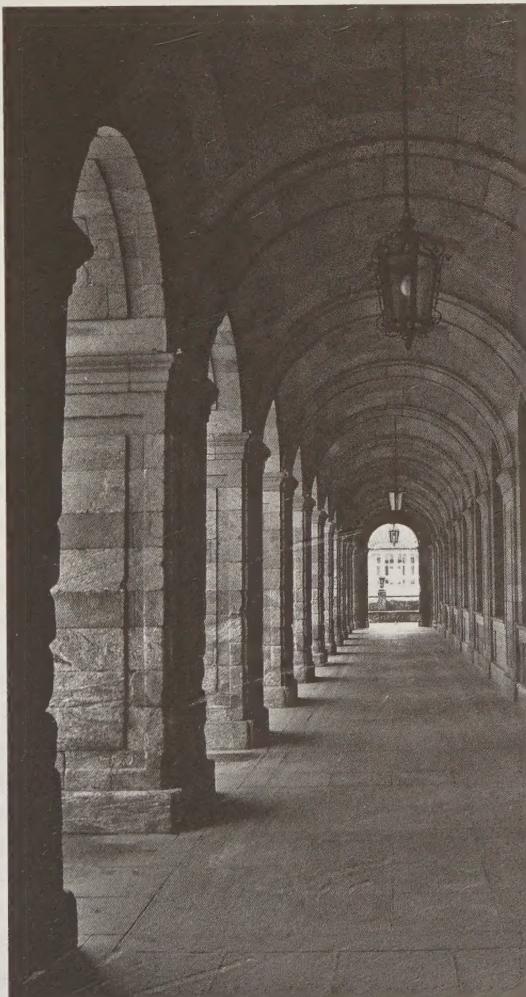
Jerusalem and Rome were considered the two most important pilgrimage destinations for Christians, but because Santiago de Compostela was closer and much safer to visit, it received far more visitors. Four major land routes to Santiago developed over the centuries. Originating in northern France and meandering south – the routes joined, crossed the Pyrenees Mountains, and then headed to north-western Spain. When we were driving through Galicia and Asturias, we often saw the signs – the golden scallop shell, the 'Camino de Santiago' the Pilgrims' Way. In fact there is a saying in Galicia that 'All roads lead to Santiago'.

Over the centuries. Originating in northern France and meandering south – the routes joined, crossed the Pyrenees Mountains, and then headed to north-western Spain. When we were driving through Galicia and Asturias, we often saw the signs – the golden scallop shell, the 'Camino de Santiago' the Pilgrims' Way. In fact there is a saying in Galicia that 'All roads lead to Santiago'.

The Benedictines built monasteries and hostels to host the pilgrims journeying the routes to Santiago, creating what is perhaps the first major European tourist industry and the birth of the hotel. (In fact, the hotel in the square by Santiago Cathedral, boasts that it is the oldest hotel in the world.) The scallop shell symbol was adopted by the Shell oil company, as a logo for travellers and later, drivers.

The emotional appeal and morale boost provided by the cult of the saint swept through Europe as pilgrims journeyed to the 'Field of the Stars' for centuries. While most came as true believers, a large number came as a stipulation to inheritance, as an alternative to prison, or simply in hopes of doing a brisk trade with the great numbers of visitors. The famous stone sculpture of St James is wearing the garb of a wandering pilgrim.

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The arcade at the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. Photo by Peter Hall

Sacred travel has a long history

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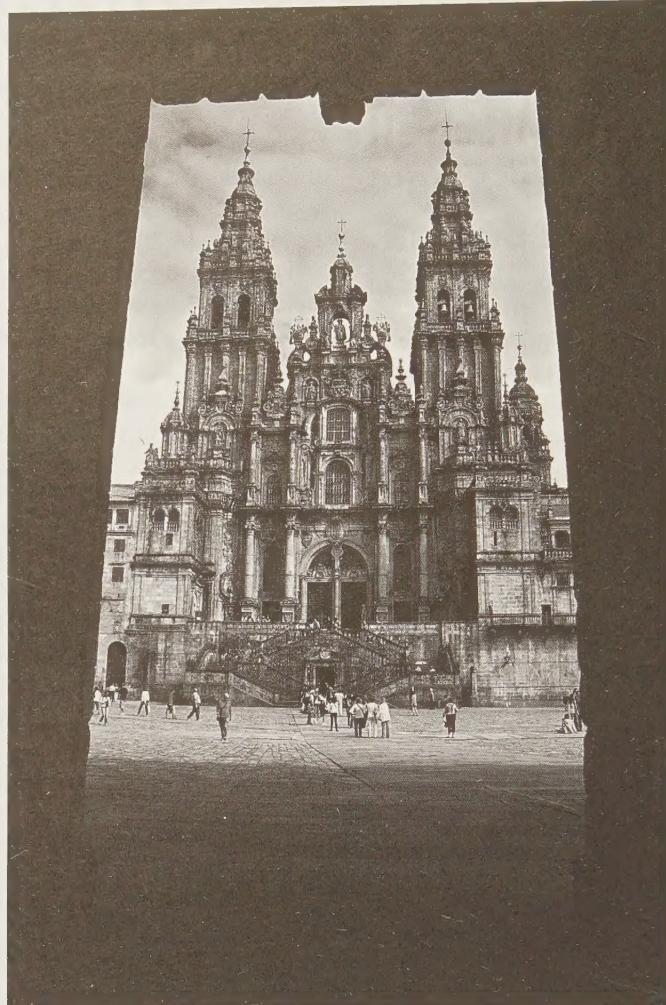
The seashells fastened on his cloak were the badges of the medieval age, signifying a pilgrim's visit to the shrine of Santiago.

The old city of Santiago de Compostela and its grand crusty cathedral are among the most beautiful medieval sites in all of Europe. Besides the visual beauty of the place, the atmosphere is charged with devotion and holiness. The institution of the Church may have resorted to some unscrupulous tactics in advertising the site yet the many millions of pilgrims who visit the shrine still came with love and sincerity in their hearts. We saw a group of teenagers arriving and singing what was obviously their tramping song on the journey – just bursting with joy and pride that they had completed their journey. The presence of that love and enthusiasm is still strongly felt at Santiago de Compostela. It is infectious. I caught it too, and was inspired to write my poem.

The idea of sacred travel runs deep in human religion, dating back to when early humans would climb hilltops to be closer to God or the sky, or go to a specific spot to dance around in circles. One of the many great spiritual discoveries of Judaism is that we are all pilgrims, strangers seeking God. Even God's chosen had to wander the wilderness to get their souls right. Spiritual talk is full of the language of travel: walking the walk, leaving behind and stepping forward, processing and recessing (that is, moving in and out) or following God's paths on our spiritual journey of life. The most common effect of a pilgrimage is that it solidifies something that is growing within you. Perhaps you are doubting what you're doing with your life: the pilgrimage may end that doubt, or may give it shape so that you can change course with confidence.

Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, and the Sea of Galilee – to Jews, Christians and to some extent Muslims, it is 'the Holy Land'. Muslims do their key pilgrimage to Mecca, the hajj, at least once in their lives. India and the East abounds with holy shrines – Hindu and Buddhist pilgrim routes too numerous to list.

The idea of pilgrimage stretches beyond faith-based journeys. For instance, there have been many pilgrimages for peace, all over the world. September 11, 2006 was the fifth anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the US, but it was also the 100th anniversary of when Mahatma Gandhi launched his



The many millions of pilgrims who visit the shrine have come with love and sincerity in their hearts. Photo by Miguel Saavedra

first campaign of non-violent direct action in South Africa. To commemorate the Gandhi Centennial, Interfaith Paths to Peace, an independent non-profit group, sponsored a five-day, 52-mile 'Gandhi Pilgrimage for Peace and Non-Violence. The pilgrimage brought together pilgrims representing all of the world's great religions who are committed to non-violent work for peace and justice.

So I have been wondering what pilgrimage means to Unitarians? I think there are several integral elements within an authentic pilgrimage experience. They are:

- Travelling / making a journey – traditionally, on foot.
- Following signs – or a planned route – perhaps broken up into stages.
- Some physical hardship or discomfort or effort.
- Faith – in either a person or a cause.
- Penance or sacrifice of some kind.
- Spiritual reward or some kind of healing.
- Courage or endurance in facing difficulties or danger or the possibility of getting lost.

- Fellowship - sharing the journey with people of like-mind.

Humanists talk about faith, and the idea that it can be non-religious. It is like *hope in action*. Surely the key feature of faith is that it cannot be proved. It is beyond or above or outside any kind of academic authenticity. Cynics may sneer at the misguided pilgrims, flocking to Santiago to pay homage to St James – who probably never set foot in Spain. But surely they miss the point? It is the *experience* of the pilgrimage that is important. The destination is merely the *focus* of that experience.

I must confess here, that I used to use the word 'faith' without much understanding of what it really means. I was brought up with it in the Church of Scotland. But real faith cannot be experienced 'second hand' through anyone else. It can be described. It can be demonstrated. But I really only began to understand what faith is when I trained as a Reiki healer. Several years of learning about meditation led me to train as a Reiki practitioner and teacher. It was the experience that brought me to some understanding of what faith means. Reiki is the Japanese word for 'Universal Life Force' or 'energy'. It is a physical experience, and an active meditation as well as a spiritual path. It is higher energy channelled mainly through the palms and the soles of the feet. It is very akin to what is known as

(Continued on next page)

Field of Stars

Scalloped sun shells guide their path
Fisherman's sign to pilgrim souls.
Staff in hand they walk in faith.
Santiago, sweet Saint James of Compostela
- field of stars.

I cannot hug your plaster form
Or kiss your cape for holy gain
My pilgrimage is of the heart.
Santiago, sweet Saint James of Compostela
- field of stars.

Hopeful hearts and living limbs
Revive and bless your ancient bones

A lifetime's journey to the light.

Santiago, sweet Saint James of Compostela - field of stars.

Lianne Mitchell - July 1999



Pilgrimages take many forms

(Continued from previous page)

'spiritual healing'. The only difference is that it uses a slightly different vocabulary, symbols or tools. Once initiated, there is no denying it. I don't understand it - I can't prove it - I just know that it flows through me and to my patients. It humbles me. It has shown me a new way to think of and experience what others might call God. It can be sent mentally, as a form of 'Distance Healing' as well as physically given. And I have come to realise that this is another form of prayer - prayer in action - which is inclusive and universal, without being attached to any one religious creed. Perhaps that's why my Unitarian heart and soul has opened to it.

Pilgrimages can take many forms. They can be taken in a group, or taken alone. Some Unitarians may consider their annual trip to GA meetings as a kind of pilgrimage. Regular attenders of Unitarian Experience Week at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow may also have a sense of making an annual pilgrimage to a place which supplies inspiration and a re-charging of their spiritual batteries.

Pilgrimage can be taken as a physical journey. And it is also a metaphor for our inner journey to find truth and meaning in our lives. An example is walking a labyrinth. There are many forms of labyrinths, one of the most famous being on the floor of Chartres Cathedral in Northern France. It is a meditational pilgrimage or journey - walked slowly and mindfully. I first experienced it at Hucklow at one of our Unitarian Earth Spirit gatherings. The social hall was mapped out with tea lights in a circular labyrinth maze. It was a beautiful and moving experience. You reach the centre which symbolises the inner centre

of your being where you are invited to take a small gift, then, you return slowly, carrying this gift. And as you retrace your steps, you pass other pilgrim walkers on the path and silently greet them. It can be a transforming experience for some people. It can be very powerful.

Unitarianism must be almost unique as a religious path which encourages 'inner travelling'. Because Unitarians are not tied to any creed, our understanding has room to grow and change, as we make our journey through life. When I became a Unitarian around 30 years ago, I was very different to who I am today. I was searching mainly for freedom - to develop and experiment with my own ideas and beliefs, and to learn from others. I considered myself to be some kind of Pantheist, moved and inspired by nature (and also music) but had lost any real faith in a personal God. For some years, I had turned away from my early church connections but as I matured, I had come to realise that I missed being part of a religious community - and that I needed a much wider and freer spiritual path than is offered by the Church of Scotland.

I went on a personal pilgrimage to many churches within the Christian faith - also to temples and synagogues, and I very nearly became a Quaker, before I discovered the Glasgow Unitarian Church. I was delighted to find I no longer needed to 'edit' out large chunks of hymns and prayers and sermons. Because this place was open to questioning, to debate, to doubt, to curiosity, to exploration, to honouring a wide variety of religious ideas, to diversity, and to respecting each person as an individual with the right to think for themselves.

Lianne Mitchell is a member of the Glasgow congregation.

Parliament of the World's Religions

Make a World of a Difference: H

By Kate Whyman

Sensually, it was a panoply of colourful raiment, ceremonies, liturgies and languages from around the world. Spiritually, [it] had the feeling of a quest, or rather thousands of individual quests pursued by people who came together not just to espouse their own beliefs but to explore together how to solve some of the world's most grievous problems.

— Trebbe Johnson, *Parabola magazine*

Nearly 6000 people from more than 80 countries gathered in Melbourne's ultra-modern Convention Centre on the bank of the Yarra River in December. Nothing unusual in that, except that these people were not delegates at some profit-motivated corporate conference; rather they were representatives of the world's religions, great and small, in all their wondrous diversity.

Even more remarkably, for the naysayers of faith, they were not there to argue over doctrine, nor to start conflicts or wage war. They were there to explain their own beliefs, yes, but just as importantly to listen to others, to exchange ideas, and to seek solutions to that perennial problem: how can we live in harmony with each other and with the beautiful, beleaguered planet on which we reside.

Melbourne's vibrant multicultural and multi-religious population made it an obvious choice of venue for the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions, which also set out to give a high profile to indigenous traditions. The city sits on land traditionally owned by the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin alliance, and their Senior Woman, Aboriginal Elder Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin, proved to be a warm and welcoming official host.

Parliament is not a decision-making body. And although there was a glittering line-up of speakers, including Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Dadi Janki, Mother Maya and HH Dalai Lama, the majority of delegates were simply, like me, the rank and file. What Parliament does do, very well, is provide a framework of plenaries and key sessions and a space in which religious traditions can organise their own observances, talks and discussions open to all.

Surely this is a vital initiative for our times. But it is not a new idea and Unitarians have played a proud part in its history. Unitarian visionary Rev Jenkins Lloyd-Jones was instrumental in organising the first ever Parliament in 1893 in Chicago, an ambitious 17-day event in which more than 3000 people took part, including Swami Vivekananda, who is credited with introducing Hindu philosophy to the West.

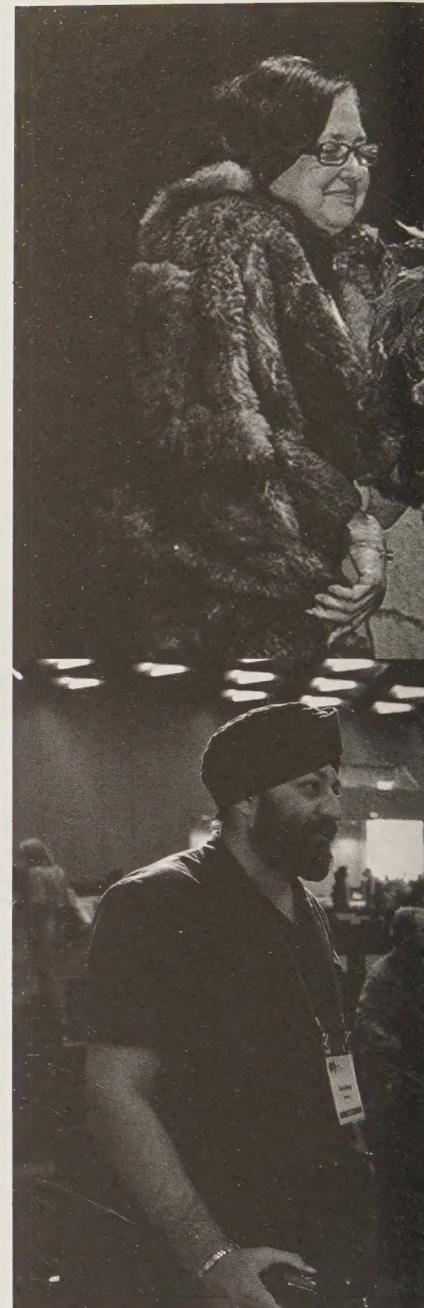
Later, in 1988, a group of religious leaders, academics and local organisers, chaired by Unitarian and Buddhist Gene Reeves, began meeting in Chicago to convene a centenary celebration of the 1893 Parliament. This group, whose earliest meetings were held in the UU Meadville Lombard Theological School, eventually formed the Council for the Parliament of World Religions, which now organises Parliaments every five years. Unitarian minister Gordon Oliver Co-Directed the Parliament in Cape Town in 1999.

How surprising then that only about 20 UU/Unitarians were present in Melbourne and none, as far as I could see, were involved in its organisation.

Nevertheless my first session was a panel in which I myself – still getting over jetlag – took part in entitled *Unitarian Universalists: Working for Peace, Civil Rights, and Earth* and chaired by International Council of Unitarians and Universalists Vice President Pauline Rooney. I offered Brighton's World Sacred Music Festival as one initiative but came away with the distinct sense that Unitarians are less socially active than they used to be – at least in the US and UK,

Now it was time to find out what other faiths were up to, but the hefty programme, which listed more than 600 events, threw me into a mild panic. What if, having flown 12,000 miles to attend, I missed the 'best' bits? However, navigating my way through Parliament's rich offerings became a spiritual discipline in itself, a lesson in accepting that I could only do what I could and that was fine.

Highlights were many but included: two friends, a Rabbi and a Swami, brought up in the same district of New York, discussing how their paths had diverged and why; a stunning didgeridoo performance that opened Parliament's 4-hour marathon sacred music concert; a spellbinding talk by 95-year-old Dadi Janki, head of the Brahma Kumaris, exhorting us to discipline our minds; and HH Dalai Lama at the closing plenary making an impassioned plea for us to turn our talk into action.



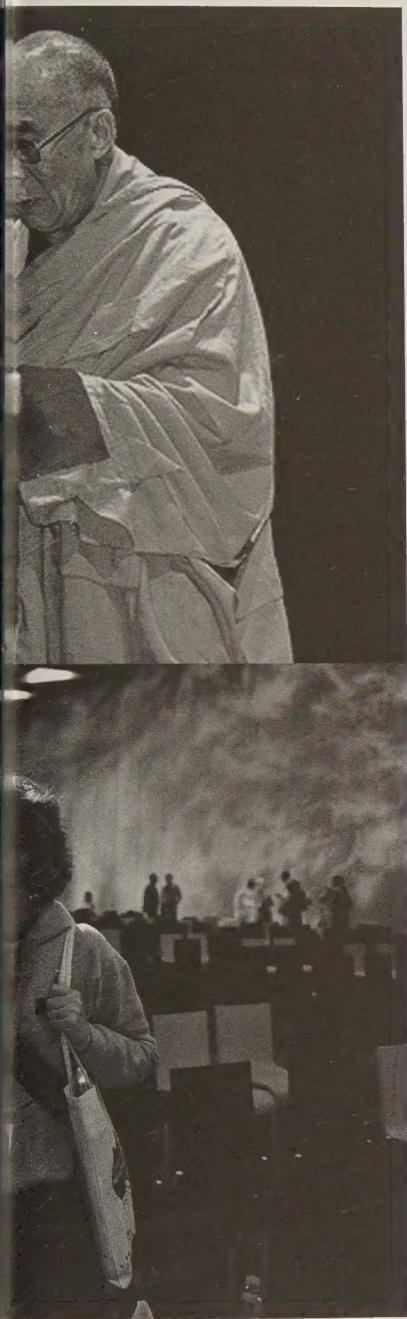
Aboriginal Senior Woman Elder Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin, British Unitarian delegate Kate Whyman and the official photographers.

The Copenhagen summit on climate change brought a sense of urgency and during the week there was encouragement on a giant scroll of paper on the vast Convention Centre foyer and in Copenhagen.

And on the final day, hundreds of delegates from the Convention Centre for a (very large) front held a long white banner, clearly reading "Protect the only earth we have".

Kate Whyman is a member of Brighton's World Sacred Music Festival. She was the Wor

ng each other, healing the Earth



Sandin (top) greets the Dalai Lama. Her friend Sandeep Virdee, one of

uch dove-tailed with Parliament, lent wrote heartfelt messages of hope and unfurled its way across the floor of and its way on a plane to be presented

ed onto the modern bridge outside the the afternoon sunshine. Those at a distance, bearing the heartfelt plea: that we do.

Church and is artistic director of the Unitarian delegate to the Parliament of and was funded by The Hibbert Trust.

What the Parliament stands for

Working towards a more just, peaceful and sustainable future lies at the heart of aspirations of people everywhere. Emerging at this moment in history is a growing and shared recognition that "we are all in this together." The deciding factor in our future will have to do with those things which will make us an Earth community, and for which we must take common responsibility.

The impetus to come to grips with this common responsibility for fostering an Earth community comes from two places: the practical and the spiritual. The following are among the most pressing challenges facing us that can only be addressed through these two inseparable dimensions. Each of these categories was a featured topic for the event in Melbourne, Australia and offers ongoing focus for the Parliament.

Healing the Earth with Care and Concern

The Parliament will draw forth the sacred nature of the environment from all religious and spiritual traditions, led by the Indigenous peoples of the earth. It will also showcase the partnership between communities and other guiding institutions in pursuing practical approaches for reversing climate change and its effects.

Reconciling with the Indigenous Peoples

The Parliament offers the opportunity to continue with the reconciliation process that the Australian government began by apologising to Indigenous people for the wrongs committed against them. Using this Australian context, the Parliament will provide an opportunity for Indigenous peoples around the world to voice their own concerns and aspirations.

Overcoming Poverty in a Patriarchal World

The Parliament provides the occasion to focus on the struggle against dire poverty across the world with the aim of making poverty history. It will be designed to strengthen religious communities in their struggle against poverty, to provide practical suggestions in the fight against poverty and for the protection of families.

Creating Social Cohesion in Village and City

Increasingly in cities across the developed world, one's neighbours are 'other' with different cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds who wish to maintain the uniqueness and integrity of their identity. This leads to the formation of transnational communities in touch with their home society and the other parts of their Diaspora. The Parliament will offer the opportunity to discuss social cohesion in the context of migration movements, transnational communities and the formation of multicultural societies and provide solutions and strategies from the grassroots to governments.

Sharing Wisdom in Search for Inner Peace

The Parliament presents an opportunity for faith traditions to share their spiritualities to others, both of and not of their tradition. It will highlight how spiritual frameworks provide a source of meaning to countless individuals; it will show how spirituality provides an anchor in a constantly changing world, an asset in time of personal and collective crisis and a source of personal and collective identity.

Securing Food and Water for All People

As the world faces challenges of consumption and sustainability, access to food and water for all people has become a pressing concern. The Parliament offers a context for religious and spiritual communities to better understand this growing crisis and to collaborate in exploring concrete possibilities for how to provide these basic necessities to everyone throughout the world.

Building Peace in Pursuit of Justice

Religious and spiritual communities can collaborate with one another and other guiding institutions to work to reverse the conditions of injustice and poverty that provide breeding grounds for extremism. Through encounter, dialogue and cooperative efforts, the Parliament will provide the opportunity to build the bonds of trust, cooperation, and understanding that it takes to overcome stereotypes and mutual misunderstanding.

©Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions

Foy Society makes 'em laugh

By Helen Hooley

The FOY Society Conference took place at Great Hucklow over the late May Bank Holiday weekend and I must say that I wouldn't have missed it for the world. Everyone agreed it was a real treat, not to mention a tonic. The theme was 'Exploring Humour' which we did very thoroughly, covering everything from the history of pantomime, stand-up comedy, slapstick and even Shakespeare. The whole thing was very ably compered and organised by Joan and Colin Partington.

It would be easy to say the highlight of the weekend was the 'home grown' show that we performed on the Sunday night, but perhaps it would be better to say that the show was the pinnacle of our achievements, there being many highlights throughout the conference.

We started off by considering what comedy is, what it does for us and how it works. It's amazing how many successful comedy shows there have been on TV over the years and how many catchphrases you remember; though trying to put a name to 42 different shows, the actors in them and the name of the characters they represented, taxed our brains somewhat.

We split into groups and within each group split again to perform a short 'act' for other members of our group. Considering that the performance was done right away, with all of five minutes of rehearsal time, the variety was amazing. For example in my group there was a magic act, a silly song, a monologue, a juggler, a mime artist and a knife thrower, to name almost everyone! All had something to contribute, though they wouldn't have thought so at the beginning of the weekend.

With this short introduction to our unimagined talents, the sky was the limit (almost) for the big Sunday night performance. We were coached by Stuart Stokell and John Topping from University of Cumbria. Thanks to Colin's persuasive abilities, he managed to get these two professionals to help us realise our potential and put on a show. We all thoroughly enjoyed devising, rehearsing and finally delivering the show, although some of us were a mite nervous. There was an awful lot of frantic rehearsing in the early evening on Sunday, with most people taking part in more than one act, but the result was a hoot of a night which occasionally had the audience practically rolling in the aisles.

The Saturday night party games must have a mention. The 'Characters Game' was very entertaining; the idea being that this was played over three rounds with various teams and the team who guessed the most characters correctly, won. Everyone had to write a name or two on a piece of paper, fold it and put it in a bowl. This could be a real person such as Madonna or the prime minister, or a fictitious character – Noddy or Batman. In round one, you had to convey to your teammates who the person was, using any words except their name and doing as many as you could in a certain time, the teams taking it in



Martin Croucher, new president of the Foy Society, participating in the social evening's entertainment at Foy's annual gathering held recently at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow. For more information about Foy see www.ukunitarians.org.uk/foy/ Photo by John Hewerdine

turn. Round two was like charades – no words or sounds at all and in round three, you could give just one word – no sounds, actions, gestures or anything else. Given that the same words were used for all three rounds, it should have got easier!

John Hewerdine took our Sunday morning service in the Old Chapel at Great Hucklow, during which I think almost all the congregation did a reading, John delivered an address with the title 'A Smile Brings us Closer' and we were entertained by music played by Richard Merritt, which very appropriately included the theme from The Pink Panther.

Our last session saw us all acting out various parts of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', notably the vastly amusing play within the play when Pyramus and Thisbe converse through the chink in the wall and also their death scene. I appreciate the whole thing so much better now and I know why Shakespearean actors 'spray what they say'!

Now, stop to consider that in the midst of all this hilarity, we also enjoyed free time on Saturday afternoon. I was one of a small party who took a stroll to Peterstone and back. Then we had the FOY AGM, at which FOY acquired some new members, one of whom undertook to be the new secretary. There were other sessions in which we saw, for instance, film clips of Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin and Laurel and Hardy among others and we managed to liven up The Queen Anne village pub for a short time. Just in case you think we were totally silly all the time, I must mention the excellent morning devotions that we were treated to on Saturday and Monday mornings by Jimmy and Shirley Timiney and Howard and Gill Hague.

I think you can tell that we all had an absolutely brilliant weekend and thanks are due to all involved, for the organisation and the fellowship. I shall remember it for a long time, especially the wisdom of the words 'Self consciousness is the enemy of creativity'. Thanks again everybody.

Helen Hooley is a member of the Foy Society.

Flowerly Field hosts exhibition

By Margaret Barber

The 80th North Cheshire Unitarian Sunday School Union (NCUSSU) Arts & Crafts Exhibition, held at Flowerly Field, Hyde, Cheshire, was opened by Tilly Pugh, a teen-ager from Stalybridge, with the Rev Eric Breeze presiding. Tilly did question why someone of her age was asked to open such an occasion, but her speech was eloquent and thought provoking for one of such tender years, proving her to be an excellent choice for the job!

The afternoon began with play reading, followed by all the musical items in the main body of the church. The tower area was used to house the recitation/reading at sight and choral verse. Our committee meeting will report on the success of this venue! Once again these items had to run concurrently, because of the increase in the number of entries, much to the chagrin of some audience members. All other exhibits were displayed in the schoolroom, which had been prepared for the day by the Redfern clan – thanks to them for their hard work in the days leading up to the 8th. The refreshment area was a delightful place to be, so close to the cookery and floral displays. Four hundred and twenty-two entries in total were presented, up by 20 on last year. The winners were: Shield:

Dukinfield, 221 points

Runners-up Shield: Flowerly Field, 172.3 points

Challenge Trophy: Flowerly Field, 81.5%

Primary Award: Dukinfield, 52.5 points

Primary Runners up Award: Flowerly Field, 41 points

Jubilee Award (10-12yrs): Frances Brookfield (Denton), 26.5

points

Teenage Award (12-18yrs): Joanna Leigh (Dukinfield), 27 points

Alice M Kelsall Award for solo singing: Grace Rider Marland and Claire Maddocks (both Dukinfield), 90%

Spotlight Award (singer with potential): Claire Maddocks

Jack Hinds Award (novice instrumentalist): Frances Brookfield, 90%

John Taylor Award (experienced instrumentalist): Joanna Leigh, 88%

Centenary Award (Duet/Choir): Gary Brookfield/Diana Simmons, 88%

Denton mixed voices, 88%

Albert Slater Trophy (Play Reading): Flowerly Field

Congratulations to everyone who won a major award, and also to the many certificate winners from the five participating Church and Sunday Schools. The interest the Exhibition seems to generate amongst us makes it all worthwhile. So thanks to everyone who entered any item or section of the Arts and Crafts, and thanks to all who came along to support the day in any way. Let's hope we can continue to embrace the element of competition in this happy way.

As ever, thanks to the members of the NCUSSU Committee who work in unison for the cause, overcoming hurdles and sorting out problems in a way our new coalition government would be proud of! Watch out Dave and Nick, I've got a team to rival yours!

Margaret Barber is secretary of the NCUSSU.



Kingswood Meeting House (Unitarian)
Packhorse Lane
Hollywood
B47 5DQ



Kingswood Meeting House wishes to appoint a
FULL TIME LAY ASSISTANT

to work with our vibrant and growing Unitarian congregation.

The successful candidate will work alongside and deputise for our Minister.

Lay Preaching experience would be an advantage, as would experience of youth ministry. The Lay Assistant will also work to enhance the pastoral care which we can offer, and will additionally be encouraged to develop his/her own areas of interest and expertise.

The post carries a salary of £14,000 together with a housing allowance
as per the GA ministerial scale.

Informal enquiries should be made to the minister, Rev. A. Howe tel. 01564 823278

For further information and an application pack please contact Karen Burns,
Chair of the Congregation, 106 Hazelville Rd, Hall Green Birmingham B28 9QD
(e-mail: karenwindells@blueyonder.co.uk)

Closing date for applications: Friday 23rd July 2010

Letters to the Editor

‘Send-a-child’ trustees need help to celebrate

To the Editor:

The trustees of ‘Send A Child To Hucklow’ are busy planning to celebrate 50 years of sending groups of underprivileged children to Great Hucklow for a week’s holiday.

We are looking to collect photographs, memories, anecdotes, quotes or other material relating to the work of SACTH over the years.

Any material can be sent to us at the address below, or email us on paulinemsmith@fsmail.net

Derek and Pauline Smith

14 Garnon Street
Mansfield, Notts. NG18 5QT.
Tel: 01623 651867

Why no election coverage in *The Inquirer*?

To the Editor:

The last three issues of ‘The Inquirer’ are remarkable, but not wholly in a good way. Whilst it is right to celebrate a successful General Assembly and an impressive new President, it is surely very strange that there has been no mention at all of the fact that there has also been during this period a general election and a change of government. Whilst other publications have been preoccupied with campaigns, debates, issues, negotiations, agreements, reforms, *The Inquirer* has stayed silent on all these things.

What does that say to someone who is an inquirer into Unitarianism? It makes us look detached from the questions which concern others, as though we have nothing to say, except about our own internal affairs. That is an approach which threatens to deprive the future political life of this country of a potentially very important contribution.

Victor Anderson

London

It makes no difference what you were born

To the Editor:

Could people please stop writing that so-and-so is ‘a born Unitarian’. Being a Unitarian is something which we commit to at an age when we have some understanding of what it means – it is not something that we are born as. The concept of being born as any religious adherent is antithetical to Unitarian thinking. I assume that it

is shorthand for being born into a Unitarian family but presumably no-one would write about me saying that I was born into an atheist family.

There is often implied extra value attached to people who come with a Unitarian ‘pedigree’. But we can take no credit for those who have gone before us. Indeed those born into Unitarian families have a head-start on the rest of us as they knew what Unitarianism was. We need to be careful with the language that we use. We all need to demonstrate that we value those of us who are ‘born again’ Unitarians just as highly as those who have Unitarian forebears.

Louise Rogers

Newcastle-under-Lyme

Auckland seeks a Unitarian minister

To the Editor:

The Auckland Unitarian Church is the longest-running Unitarian congregation in New Zealand; and the only one with our own building, completed in 1904. We are lay led at present, having been without a minister for several years. We have grown from 30 to 40 members in the last year; and have a strong children’s programme, with up to 17 children aged 4 to 13 present on Sundays. Find out more on our website www.unitarian.org.nz/auckland

In 2007, 08 and 09 we were fortunate to have visiting ministers from Maryland, Massachusetts and Washington spend between three and four months with us. We would like to welcome another Unitarian minister for a visit in 2011. We do not offer a salary, rather airfares, accommodation and use of a car for the duration of the visit. Our previous visitors have offered Sunday services and some workshops or adult RE courses; and have been free to travel around New Zealand.

New Zealand’s summer weather extends from November through to March, although this year Auckland had a very long warm, dry period – it really only started to get cold and wet in the third week of May. We do not do services after Christmas Eve until the beginning of February.

If you are a minister with a sabbatical planned for next year, or are recently retired and might be interested in visiting us, please contact me as soon as possible, as I have been asked by the

management committee to co-ordinate arrangements.

My email is karen.cleary.nz@gmail.com or telephone 64 9 5284905.

Thank you and we look forward to hearing from interested people.

Karen Cleary

For Auckland Unitarian Church
Annual report should
include membership tally

To the Editor:

Further to the figures that Jim Corrigall (Inquirer letter, 29 May) has extracted from Jeff Teagle’s analysis of Denominational Membership by Quota figures:

Of the 45 congregations that grew over the 16 year period from 1989 to 2005: 30 grew by between 1 and 9 members 9 grew by between 10 and 19 members 2 grew by between 20 and 29 members, 4 grew by 30-plus.

There has been no official update since 2005, except that in 2007, Popularis – organisers of the Executive Committee election – issued 3933 voting papers to quota-paying members. This indicates a further fall in membership from the 4012 shown in the Teagle analysis.

Surely it is time that an annual statement of membership is issued in the GA Annual Report, particularly as the current issue of Whittaker’s Almanac gives our membership as standing at 5000. This is plainly a distorted figure.

Peter Whitham

Stockton

Inquirer letters policy

Letters should be succinct. It is preferable that they are sent by email to inquirer@btinternet.com Typewritten or legible handwritten submissions may be sent to the editor at 46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 6UF

Letters should be signed with the writer’s full name and, if applicable, the name of the group or congregation with which the writer is affiliated. A postal address and telephone number are required, for verification purposes. Letters will be edited for length and content and may appear in an excerpted form. Any affiliations listed with letter writers’ names are for identification purposes only, and should not suggest the view expressed is representative of that body.

No need to defend 'The Enlightenment'

By Alan Ruston

At the recent GA meetings a resolution was put forward from Westgate Chapel Wakefield that we should affirm the importance of what is known as the 'Enlightenment', which has as its base the seeking out of new knowledge and of wisdom based on nature, science and reason. It was a well-meaning proposal, but the wording of the resolution was non specific and what was said by delegates in its support was unfocused, so we could not seemingly get to grips with its essential meaning. It was defeated by 30 votes to 28 with 88 abstentions. The Assembly was confused.

It struck me that some comment on the Enlightenment and Unitarians is called for in the columns of *The Inquirer*, as certain of the issues associated with it deserve further discussion. "The Enlightenment" has been given differing definitions but it was, at its broadest, a philosophical movement of the 18th century which stressed human reasoning over blind faith or obedience, in contrast with much of the religious and political order of the day, while also encouraging 'scientific' thinking based on the experimental approach.

The Enlightenment is often cited as being the start of the modern era, and the scientific advances of later times arose as a result. Put simply; no Enlightenment, no Darwin. Our present Western way of thinking and action have come from it, and Unitarianism has been called one of the children of the Enlightenment, resting as we do on the reasoned approach to religious matters.

Hitherto always thought a 'good thing', doubts have been expressed recently as to the Enlightenment's beneficial impact. These have come from certain religious fundamentalist thinkers who see it as constituting a continuous attack on traditional religion, and also from those who believe the adoption of the scientific approach has been the wrong course for humankind to take.

Essentially Unitarians can only affirm the principles of the En-

lightenment. It is their birthright. No Enlightenment, no Unitarianism – so central has been its impact to our thinking and practice. However, whether supporting a movement of thought that is so wide ranging and diffuse is a good subject for a GA resolution, is another matter. The Enlightenment needs to be considered anew by liberal religionists in each generation so the subject of the failed resolution is of importance. We have accepted the ideal behind it without further thought in the past – which is never a sensible approach.

The first thing to be said is that there's no point in deciding to decry the Enlightenment and what has followed. The genii was released long ago and can't be put back in the bottle. It is argued by scholars like Karen Armstrong that religious fundamentalism itself arose from the Enlightenment. Before the later 19th century the Bible, for example, was looked on by most as true but much of its content was seen as a beautiful and meaningful metaphor. However, then the scientific approach was applied by some to the text, including those parts that were metaphor, the beautiful visions. Thus it is argued that the fundamentalist approach applied to sacred works – seeking to show for example how the miracles worked in practical terms – is itself a fruit of adopting the method of the Enlightenment. Do we have to defend the Enlightenment? I'm not certain we do; it's so much part of the west and warp of the modern Western world that it's impossible to deny its impact. The initial impetus for the GA resolution was the Prince of Wales's statement that we need to look at it afresh. There maybe some justification for this, if taken to mean that we always need to look anew at the principles on which our world view is based. We should not deny it or seek to turn back the clock but rather evaluate how our world is developing and ask ourselves if the Enlightenment fosters and sustains the human spirit and its expression in 2010.

Alan Ruston is editor of 'Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society' and a member of the Watford Fellowship.

Encourage proper discussion before motions

By Arthur Brown

I hope it is not too late to contribute to the discussions about this year's GA meeting. I enjoyed it; one could not help but do so, the beautiful environment, the meeting of old friends and the making of new ones, and so on. But its success has to be judged not just on whether it gave everybody a good time, but on what we learnt and what it achieved, and central to that are the business meetings.

The one non-domestic motion that was up for discussion was from Wakefield and this was an important one. It wished us to affirm that the cultural change known as 'The Enlightenment' has been of immense benefit to humankind in its seeking out of knowledge old and new, and that its emphasis on wisdom being derived from many sources, *including science and reason*, must be maintained. Of course it must; our adherence to that principle down the years is our sole justification for our continuance as a separate denomination.

I quote from the Essex Hall lecture of 1985 given by Dr Duncan Howlett: 'We are distinguished by our belief that all doctrines and dogmas are, at best, formulations of what we think the truth may be. They are subject to constant review,

change, development and improvement. This is who and what we are ... I suggest that in the Unitarian movement, our way is the critical way.'

He defines the word 'critical' in its original Greek way as 'the ability to discern or judge clearly, objectively and dispassionately.'

How close this is to a definition of that way of thinking which distinguished the Enlightenment, and hence the importance of the Enlightenment, and its offspring, Science, to our movement?

Unfortunately, the Wakefield motion had a passing reference in it to a remark made by the Prince of Wales, and the subsequent discussion dribbled away into a pointless argument about whether the remark had been taken out of context.

In the end the motion was not defeated, it was deleted and removed from the records. Surely such debacles as this over an important subject should be avoided in the future by a proper discussion, and, if necessary, educational effort, beforehand leading to the preparation of a consensual motion to be brought before the business meeting?

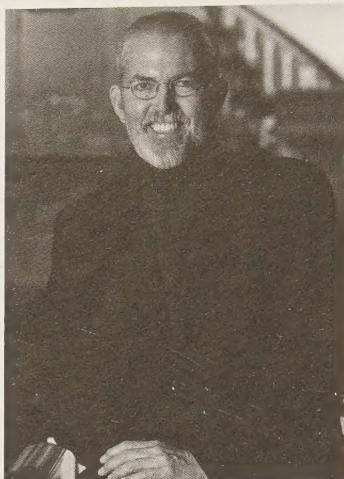
Arthur Brown is a member of the Bristol congregation.

How to Begin (Changing Your Life)

(Continued from page 2)

8 Begin by looking for new questions, not old answers. Answers close doors. Questions open them. Answers lock us in place. Questions lead us on adventures. Socrates boasted himself the most ignorant man in Athens. Each new insight raised a dozen questions, extending the compass of his ignorance. Yet beyond every ridge he climbed there lay a wider vista. The more questions we have, the farther we can see.

9 Begin with little regard for where your path may lead. Destinations are overrated. And never what we imagine. Even should we somehow manage to get where we are heading, we won't end up there. Until life ends, no destination is final. In fact, the best destinations are those we look back upon as new beginnings. Good journeys always continue. So don't be driven by desire (that empty place within you), never to rest until you reach your goal. Invest your joy in the journey.



*The Rev Dr Forrest Church
(1948-2009)*

10 Begin in the middle. Our lives will end mid-story, so why not begin there? Don't wait around for the perfect starting pistol. Or until you are ready. You may never be ready. No reason to wait in the grandstand for some official to guide you to the gate. Jump the fence. Enter the race in the middle. Here. Now. As you are. By doing what you can. With those who are closest to you. By turning the page. Cleaning up your slate. Looking for new questions, not old answers. And with little regard for where your path will lead.

Finally, before you begin, a bonus suggestion – Begin small. Dream possible dreams. Set out to climb a single hill, not every mountain. Soul work needn't be strenuous to be high impact. You can begin transforming your life with a single phone call. Or by writing a kind letter. Or by opening your blinds to let the sun flood in. Don't say it's nothing. It's everything. For you have now begun.

– *The Rev Dr Forrest Church*

Ministry Inquiry Days

Want to know more about training as a Unitarian & Free Christian minister or lay pastor/leader and working with our congregations?

This summer, the Ministry Commission is holding Inquiry Days for people who are at an early stage of considering this possibility as well as for those who are almost ready to make an application for training.

Manchester, Cross Street Chapel;
Saturday, July 24th

London, Kensington Unitarians; Saturday,
August 21st

Times for both venues: 11 for 11.30 start –
3.30pm finish

Booking deadlines: July 14 for Manchester
and August 11 for London.

Advance booking essential

For more information and to book, please contact:

Mary-Jean Hennis at Unitarian General
Assembly, Essex Hall,
1–6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY

Phone: 020 7240 2384

Email: mhennis@unitarian.org.uk

POSITION VACANT ADMINISTRATOR

for Unitarian College, Manchester

14 hours per week basic, flexible hours on certain dates, salary £9,085: plus relevant expenses

To start 1 September 2010

The college committee seeks a new administrator. Applicants should have secretarial skills, basic computer literacy and book-keeping skills, and an ability to work on their own initiative in a busy one-person office. They should be in sympathy with the Unitarian movement and its general ethos.

For information and application forms, please contact:

The Administrator, Unitarian College
Luther King House
Brighton Grove, Rusholme
Manchester M14 5JP

Email liz.shaw@lkh.co.uk

Telephone: 0161 249 2501

Closing date for applications
30 June 2010.

Interviews will take place on a date to be arranged